

**PRACTICAL REMARKS  
ON BELFRIES AND  
RINGERS**

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Practical remarks on belfries and ringers by Henry Thomas Ellacombe

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**HENRY THOMAS ELLACOMBE**

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BELFRIES AND RINGERS

BY

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

READ WITH A PAPER ON BELLS (OMITTING THE APPENDED RULES) BEFORE THE  
BRISTOL ARCHITECTURAL SOCIETY, ON MONDAY, DEC. 10, 1849.

Third Edition,  
WITH AN APPENDIX ON CHIMING.



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268. a. 63.

“Some, perhaps, may wonder why any one should thus trouble himself about so low and mean a subject as this is generally thought to be ; but I think nothing mean or low, that hath any relation to the service of God and His Church.”—BY BEVERIDGE, in his *Tract on Psalmody*, p. 118, Edit. 1710.

WITH PERMISSION,

MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

TO

HIS GRACE THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY,  
PRIMATE OF ALL ENGLAND ;

TO

HIS GRACE THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF YORK,  
PRIMATE OF ENGLAND ;

TO

HIS GRACE THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH,  
PRIMATE OF ALL IRELAND ;

TO

HIS GRACE THE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN,  
PRIMATE OF IRELAND ;

By Their Graces'

MOST OBEDIENT, HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

(1861.)

"The revived interest in all ecclesiastical studies has extended to bells, and the researches of MR. ELLACOMBE are worthy fruits of this newly-awakened spirit."—QUARTERLY REVIEW, No. cxc., p. 308.

"The REV. H. T. ELLACOMBE, Rector of Clyst St. George, Devonshire, has published *Practical Remarks on Belfries and Ringers, with an Appendix on Chiming*. [Bell & Daldy.] These are exceedingly sensible and judicious; and we should be glad to hear that they were circulated extensively. The author holds it to be essential for the proper management of a belfry that the ringers should be paid out of an endowment fund. He adds a set of rules which have been proved by experience to be suitable for a large peal; and the Appendix is illustrated by some useful descriptive plates of the method of hanging bells and of contriving chimes."—ECCLESIOLOGIST.



## PRACTICAL REMARKS

ON

## BELFRIES AND RINGERS.

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REARED in a country parsonage, and close to a peal of eight bells, as musical and as well rung as any in the kingdom, it has been my lot from childhood to have seen much of the practices in a country belfry. They had better, I grieve to say, be passed over in silence ; for such things as I remember to have seen and heard would hardly be tolerated in a village ale-house ; and yet the ringers were considered respectable, honest men in their way, and had the honour—many of them—of being the ringers of the Cathedral bells in the adjoining city, where fifteen men were required ; and it was a well-known fact that, as a body, a more drunken set of fellows could not be found. It is painful to me even to allude to such ungodly practices : I mention the fact, in the hope that it may perhaps call the attention of those in authority to this crying evil, which exists more or less in every parish and belfry in England ; for I fear it may be too truly said, “*Ex uno disce omnes ;*” and how dreadful it is to think of such conduct in a Church, if perchance (as formerly no doubt was universally the case) the ropes hang down to the pave-

ment of the ground floor. It is therefore high time—especially in these days, when so many efforts are made to restore a better discipline, and a more legitimate and correct system in all Church matters—that some move should be made towards bringing the belfry and the occupiers thereof under regulations in accordance with Church order and discipline.

Perhaps no one thing has been the source of such constant trouble and annoyance to the clergyman as the belfry and the ringers; especially if the same parties happened to belong to the self-appointed and conceited choir of "*the singers*." I have heard of clergymen who have even refused to accept a living where there was a peal of bells; and of those who have said, upon learning the number of the bells in the tower, "Then, certain it is, there are as many drunkards in the village." "That man is a ringer," is quite enough in some places to intimate that he is an idle, sottish character. I know one clergyman who left his curacy in Worcestershire on account of the conduct of the ringers.

The condition of the belfry itself rarely seems to have attracted the notice of the Deans-rural, or of the Bishops and Archdeacons, so as to form one of the articles of inquiry issued to the churchwardens to be presented at their respective visitations; or surely much of the dirt and rubbish, which may generally be found there, would long ago have been swept away, and their dilapidated state repaired.

I would therefore most respectfully suggest that, in all such articles of inquiry, questions should be inserted as to the condition and cleanliness of the

belfry—the character and conduct of the ringers—whether drinking or smoking is ever practised there—and whether ringing matches for prizes are allowed?

There can be no doubt that such an inquiry would be productive of very great benefit: it would strengthen the minister's position, and put the churchwardens on their guard, if they found such points closely inquired into; especially if they found the inquiry was followed up by firm, active and *judicious* proceedings. For, in country parishes especially, the churchwardens have hitherto been rarely found to uphold the minister in such matters; in many places being raised but little above the grade of the ringers, and in some places being themselves of the number: thus the minister, feeling that the whole onus of controlling the bells and correcting abuses in the belfry rests solely on his shoulders, he is induced rather to let things go on as he found them, than screw up his moral courage to undertake the task of bringing about a reformation. For though the controlling power, which by law the minister possesses over the bells, is generally now pretty well understood,\* and his veto upon their use established, yet, unless absolutely necessary, and in very glaring cases, it will be found a very impolitic step for him to exercise his right; and, by *such* means,

\* In the time of the public excitement about Queen Caroline, and the passing of the Reform Bill, several cases of most disgraceful conduct on the part of ringers were brought before the authorities, and the offenders were punished.

The 88th Canon is sufficiently powerful. See also Dr. Phillimore's Edition of *Burn's Eccles. Law*; or the late Editions of Priccaux's *Guide to Churchwardens*.